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MAGIC AMONG THE RED MEN.

BY PROF. H. KELLAR.

THERE was a thrilling scene on the prairie at the Indian station of Rosebud, in South Dakota, a few years ago, which first awakened my attention to the fact that what we heedlessly term magic exists with deeply interesting complications and weird suggestions among the Indians of North America. There was to be a beef allotment by the agent, and the braves had assembled for hundreds of miles to share in the distribution of their staple of food and the festivities which attended it. Near by were the agency buildings and the cattle stockade. A magnificent expanse of flower-spangled verdure stretched to the north, dotted with the tepees of the newly-arrived warriors, while the log cabins of the progressive Indians, as those are called who adapt themselves to white men's civilization, were gathered near by. The great chief Red Cloud, to whom the Ogallalla Sioux looked up with a veneration genuinely characterized by affection, stood surveying the scene. On his serene but stern brow there was an expression of melancholy, but the interest which all that concerned his people awakened in his manly heart shone from his eyes. He was a man of tremendous physical force, and a warrior and counsellor who could hold his own with any mighty men of ancient or modern times.

The sun had set and a cold moon in the first flush of its full splendor whitened the prairie with a ghostly frost. From hundreds of camp fires there came the sounds of rejoicing. A medicine man, that is, a morose, rather flabby-looking Indian who had been pointed out as the high priest of the Ogallallas, strolled by where we were standing, on his way to his tepee, which was at some distance from the others. It was larger, and the skins of which it was composed were beautifully painted in colors with battle scenes and those emblematic outline sketches which the

Indians have for centuries loved to make of their favorite "medicine." A rather massive looking centre pole, curiously enough, supported this tepee, instead of the slanting poles which met diagonally over head and rested upon each other in the skin tents of the braves. "What is the red man's medicine?" was the question which his white visitor put to Red Cloud. The old man said nothing; but after repeated solicitations consented that his Caucasian friend should go to the medicine man's wigwam and say that it was the wish of Red Cloud that the mysterious priest should give this paleface whatever enlightenment he chose upon the question.

No one familiar with the strong religious nature of the North American Indian, his marvellous confidence in and reliance upon the Great Spirit, whose worship is almost the same in all the great Indian families and tribes in North America, would have been likely to ask any such question of a chief. To the Indian medicine means mystery; it is the essential element of his religion and has a sacred and solemn significance which has for generations guarded its secrets from the curious and unworthy. To go through the medicine lodge was the greatest ordeal that awaited a brave prepared to take his place among the warriors of his tribe. On the rare occasions when this privilege was demanded by and accorded to a squaw, the event was of such moment as for a time to eclipse all the other matters of interest. The secrets for which an Indian would give his life would naturally not flow out in answer to a white man's idle curiosity.

The medicine man heard in silence what the intruder had to say. He took down a beautifully fashioned bow which hung from his tent-pole and carefully selected seven finely-finished arrows, the shafts of which were of the native color of the wood, the feathers from a gray hawk and the points, not of the steel at that time so freely used for the purpose, and, indeed, manufactured by white men, but of a pale flint as hard as cornelian. The seeker after knowledge watched the seer as he examined his weapons, and, when he strode out on the prairie a distance of thirty or forty feet from his tepee, followed him. There was an extraordinary brilliancy in the atmosphere that evening, which left no doubt that, whatever the medicine man chose to do, a practised eye could readily follow. Drawing an arrow to the head on his bowstring, and looking up one moment into the zenith as if to locate the exact spot he pro-

posed to pierce with his shaft, he released his powerful bow, and the dart that left its cord flew straight and swift and glittering for a moment, in the moonlight, in a course which it seemed would inevitably bring it down upon the very head of the archer himself. The eye tried in vain to follow the course of this beautiful messenger from earth to heaven; there was, one fancied, a smile upon the face of the medicine man as, with growing attention, we waited to hear the whistle of the returning arrow. After an interval which seemed doubly long to me, he dispatched the second shaft after the first and, it seemed, in exactly the same airy channel. There was still no indication of what had become of these arrows and the medicine man was still silent. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth shafts were drawn from the quiver and dispatched in succession at the zenith. As the last sang its farewell to his bowstring the medicine man dropped the tip of his bow to the prairie and leaned upon it thoughtfully. A glance at my watch showed that just fifteen minutes had elapsed since he dispatched the first of his airy missiles, no one of which had fallen to earth so far as I could tell. Five minutes more and he returned to his tepee, closed the skin flap and strode away toward Red Cloud's house. I was determined to see the thing through, and after waiting a decent time for him to return, opened the tent flap and entered the tepee. The bow and the now empty quiver, save for one shaft, hung where I had first seen it. I waited for hours intending to give the fellow all the money I had to tell me his secret. He did not return any more than did his mysterious arrows.

A subsequent discovery that the Indian medicine men have known for centuries of the existence of magnetic iron ore, and have utilized this great secret knowledge in their own way, has given some plausibility to the suggestion a friend has made that the hollow centre-pole of this tepee was of magnetic iron, and that the medicine man was an archer of sufficient skill to be able so as to direct his shafts one after another that upon their return to earth, unseen in the pale moonlight, they buried themselves in the ground at the bottom of the centre-pole, swerved, it might be, a few inches by its magnetic attraction. Whether or no this was the case, I do know it to be a fact that among the Minnesota Sioux, who were responsible for the awful massacres of the early sixties, it was the custom for a medicine man upon the eve

of the declaration of war to conduct the warriors of the tribe to a plain on the upper Mississippi which terminated abruptly at the base of a bluff some forty feet high. Upon this bluff in rude aboriginal painting there were a number of allegorical figures and several large war shields drawn in what was apparently the solid rock. The medicine man would marshal his braves within easy bow-shot and fire an arrow at the cliff. If the arrow stuck to the stone and did not fall to the ground he gave it out that the Great Spirit intended his red children should fight and win. If the arrow fell to the ground, however, the red men were warned that they would be defeated in the coming strife. Of course knowing which part of the cliff's surface was of the magnetic iron ore, and which of the baser material, that would not attract and hold a shaft head, the medicine man, were he so disposed, could influence the coming event.

An exhaustive study of this fascinating subject has convinced me that few races at any time in the history of the world have been more powerfully moulded by their religious beliefs than the American Indian. As Charles Godfrey Leland says in a note to the marvellous adventures of that frontier half Indian, half white man, Jim Beckwourth, whose fame, among the knowing, is not less than that of Kit Carson himself, the word medicine as used by the Indians means magic, supernatural knowledge, inspiration, and the use of amulets and charms. The origin of this curious interpretation lies in the belief that all diseases are caused by evil spirits and so require magical powers to exorcise them. A sick Indian could only be cured by a sorcerer, and the more hideous the sorcerer made himself by paint, horns, skins and skulls the more potency there was in his spells and the better chance the patient had. In no time or country of which I have ever heard was it true that the doctors of a people ranked even higher than their warriors, and were high chiefs, high priests and high medicine men all in one. But this comes very near to being the case among the North American aborigines, among all of whom it must be remembered the form of government is a theocracy of which the medicine man is the high priest.

The veneration with which the Parsees regard fire, which is the sacred symbol of the benevolence and power and beauty of their unseen god, is akin to the feeling of mysterious awe with which the Indians have always surrounded the secrets of their

medicine. This their religion, their fleshly and spiritual consolation in one, is almost the only possession they now have left to them from their forefathers. Secrecy is its keynote. The medicine men of the Sioux and Cheyennes and Arapahoes and Pawnees have known for a much longer period than the white men can estimate of the existence of the famous pipe-clay ledges in the upper Mississippi valley from which the red pipes so wonderfully fashioned by the Indians have been made for generations. It was not until a long and fruitless search had been made that the whites discovered one of these pipe-clay ledges back of Mankato, Minn. Sitting Bull, perhaps the best known red man to the white people of this decade and at whose door the more recent disturbances among the Sioux have been laid, was no war chief at all. He was simply the high priest or medicine man of his tribe developed among influences which brought out the peculiar ruthlessness of his nature. In the great medicine lodge or council chamber of the Sioux, Sitting Bull was feared as much, almost, as among the lonely cabins of the frontiersmen. When a chief differed with him, Bull would stride over to where he sat and brain him at a blow. Nobody dared to punish him for this.

Indian magic finds its most startling survival and most horrible illustration in the snake dance of the Moqui of Arizona. This ceremonial occurs once in two years, although it has long been under the ban of the government, and it is still, or has been within a year or two, observed with all the awful features which for a half century have made it famous in the Rocky Mountains. The very abuse which has been showered upon the Moqui for the exercise of their own religious rites and the gratification of those impulses which they hold to be the highest and holiest, whether they so seem to us or not, is itself strikingly suggestive of our inability to understand Indian medicine. It was in the village of Walpi in Northern Arizona that my informant saw the snake dance and gave me a description so grotesque as rather to dissuade me from my intention of making the journey to see it with my own eyes. Upon the top of a lofty butte which rises to a height of five hundred feet from the plains are the houses of the Moqui, built of stone and giving the entire structure the appearance of a natural castle. One hundred and thirty members of the band are chosen biennially to pay to the Great Spirit the devotion which the Moqui believe finds its most appropriate expression in a carnival of

serpents. For four days before the dance itself the Moqui had scattered over the mesas, each armed with a forked wooden rod and two eagle feathers. The entire face of the country seemed to be covered with rattlesnakes, for it is a frontier superstition that the snakes enjoy the dance quite as much as the Indians do, and whenever the Indian found one he bewitched him by a slow harmonic movement of the eagle feathers, acquiring at once over the serpent an influence which enabled him to bag it in short order. From what I have seen of the snake charmers of India I am convinced that the Moqui must practise upon the susceptibilities of their charming pets by the aid of music, since although a snake has no ears, it is always susceptible through the muscles of the throat to musical sounds, however low and grotesque, so long as they are harmonious. It may be by some contrivance carried in his mouth that the Moqui elicit these sounds, or they may resort to the device of the fetish priests in Congo land who pretend to develop from an antelope's horn their so-called magical music, which is in reality produced by a perforated bean concealed in the nostril of the magician and through which he has taught himself to blow musically.

Hundreds of rattlesnakes were secured by the Moqui, and were placed in a great basket at the gateway of the village, and covered by a buffalo hide. On the morning of August 18, for that is the date for the festival, the hundred and thirty chosen warriors marched to a platform of loose boards over which the squaws had strewn sacred meal. These Indian women wore white mantles, and had their long black hair done up in enormous cart wheels. The braves each wore a tunic reaching midway on the thigh, moccasins upon the feet, and upon the naked calf of the right leg of each one the shell of a terrapin in which were confined small pebbles which rattled as the warrior moved and made of him, to the ear at least, a human rattlesnake. Around each one's brow was bound a white handkerchief, the upper part of the forehead being painted a deep black and the lower half black and white in alternate bands. After they had marched over the sacred meal, they arranged themselves in a double column facing the plain. A gigantic attendant whose face was completely hidden by his handkerchief, and whose body was hideously painted, stood at the snake cage and as each pair of braves marched past him thrust his naked arm into the cage, and jerked from it a writhing serpent

which he handed to the buck. The snake dancer, reaching forward his hideously marked visage, seized the snake by its middle in his teeth. The serpent struggled wildly and his human captor, gesticulating with both hands, joined at once in the solemn rhythmic movement in which after each had been supplied with his own particular rattlesnake the entire hundred and thirty were soon gyrating.

Upon the cliffs around them the entire Moqui nation was seated, dumb with religious awe. No sound came from that grim audience. Nor was there aught to break the horrible stillness of the place except the hissing of the serpents and the rattling of the pebbles in the shells upon the warriors' legs. The snakes themselves, although animated to the utmost with venomous life, neither struck at the men nor rattled their own tails. When once in the course of the dance a rattler sunk his fangs into the cheek of the brave next to the one who held the serpent in his teeth, he was calmly pulled away as if nothing had happened, and the brave who had been bitten continued, with perfect equanimity, his fanatic dance. At the end of some thirty minutes the snakes were thrown in a writhing mass upon the earth and sprinkled with sacred meal. The dancers divided themselves into four squads, and at a given signal each squad rushed upon the mass of serpents, each warrior grasped as many of them as he could in his two hands and bounded away at top speed, one band to the south, one to the north, one to the east, and one to the west, until they had raced a half mile over the prairie. The snakes were then turned loose, and the dancers returned, running their utmost to the butte, and, climbing up its steep sides, disappeared, one after another, in the cavernous depths of the estufa, or great stone chamber, about which cluster the traditions of the Aztecs, and a magnificent example of which is to be found at Pecos, in New Mexico.

Now if this power of the Moqui Indians to make companions of venomous rattlesnakes, to toss them about at will and to join with them in the mad whirl of a dance the like of which is not to be found elsewhere in the world, is not magic, what is it? The guiding principle of my life has been an absolute refusal to believe in supernatural methods or results. The marvels which the high caste Indian fakirs achieve, and have achieved under my very eyes, with apparent disregard of all the known laws of matter, have not served to change my creed. The occult is not

necessarily supernatural. The objection that the Moqui Indians do not expose themselves to the poison fangs of the rattlesnakes, but that the rear back fang which in reality is the only communication between the poison bag and the jaws of the serpent, has been secretly removed, does not, I think, stand the test of examination. It is the universal testimony of the white men who have seen the Moqui snake dance that the reptiles selected for it are gathered at random on the prairie and utilized strictly in a state of nature.

It is hopeless to expect a Moqui to reveal his tribal secret, for the oath which every Indian warrior takes on his initiation into the warpath secret binds him by his gun, his pipe, his knife, the earth and the sun to reveal none of his medicine. The medicine lodge of old was built in the first moon of each May, and before the lodge poles were raised the medicine men of the tribe selected a medicine chief who was to lead the fighting men to battle during the ensuing year. This chief was bound with thongs to the top of a lodge pole forty feet tall and upon his shoulders were fastened in like manner a pair of wings from a freshly killed eagle. The medicine men then took hold of the butt end of the lodge pole as if to raise it to its position and the brave with it, but if the medicine of the latter was to be good and powerful, his eagle wings did most of the lifting and he and the pole floated gracefully up into the air until the great spar was in a perpendicular position. The other poles were then set up and the great medicine lodge or council chamber was complete. Rather than violate one of its secrets, a Moqui, or any other real Indian, would cheerfully hack off every one of his ten fingers.

There has been a tradition that the medicine men of the once famous Pawnee tribe were peculiarly gifted. That this is anything more than a tradition I do not believe, for at a time when the Sioux and Cheyennes, Crows and Blackfeet in the north, and the Comanches, Apaches and Navahoes in the south, were the most famous of the aborigines, and showed, as they still show, the most powerfully developed types, the horse-stealing Pawnees who lived along the valleys of the Platte and the Arkansas, whose hand was against every man and whose treaties were only made to be broken, had already begun to dwindle into that insignificance in which we find them to-day in their transplanted home in the Indian Territory. James Beckwourth, the famous

scout, who became a war chief under the name of Medicine Calf among the Crows, has related to a friend an extraordinary feat of levitation which a great war chief of the Crow Indians performed in his presence on the eve of leading his warriors to battle. The chief was an aged man and professed to have a premonition of death. For many moons he had led the Crows successfully against their hereditary foes, the Blackfeet. It was not his heart that failed him now, but his medicine had lost its potency. In the dusk of the gray morning he led his braves out on an open prairie, and, setting his shield on edge some fifteen or twenty feet in front of them, pointed to it with his lance. As the eyes of the fighting men rested upon the embossed surface of the buckler it appeared to rise slowly from the ground until it reached a height corresponding to the head of the chief; it then, by the same invisible means, passed through the air until it obscured his face and hid it from his warriors. A thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage, but no word was spoken. It was taken as an emblem of his approaching eclipse, his banishment from this world, his journey to the land of the Great Spirit, to which all Indians, good and bad alike, went with unhesitating faith. The great chief was killed that morning. On the robe of a famous Pawnee medicine man I have seen drawn in outline his warlike exploits with the allegorical figures of the animal or bird which was medicine to him, such as the bear, for example, and those phases of the sun and moon to which the medicine man attached such importance.

Prior to the inception of any great enterprise, such as an expedition of war, a great hunt, or the like, the medicine men of a band of Indians invariably "made medicine" for several days. They sang a monotonous chant during this time, beating their medicine drums and dancing as with muscles of iron. On one occasion, to avert the wrath of the Great Spirit, a great Crow chief had the brass medicine kettle of his tribe brought out and placed in full view of the assembled village. It held ten gallons and was as bright as the sun. Into it each brave threw his most cherished possession, and three Indian maidens then carried it to the river and threw it in. This was a sacrifice like that of the Roman Curtius, to save the commonwealth.

One of the most general of all the customs of the aborigines was that of the medicine bag which each brave carried on his

person from the time he became a fighting man until his death. Without it he could succeed in nothing he undertook. To lose it in battle unless he lost his life as well, or captured the medicine bag of another brave, was a disgrace fully equal to that of the Roman who lost his shield. On approaching the age of puberty the Indian boy retired to a solitary spot, where for several days he lay on the ground without nourishment, praying to the Great Spirit. When at last he slept the sleep of exhaustion, his mind was still intent upon that image of his dreams which was to indicate to him his medicine. Whatever bird or animal first appeared to him in his slumber he at once set out to hunt down on his awakening. He took its skin, whether bird, reptile or beast, stuffed it with moss, ornamented it elaborately, and thenceforth it was dearer to him than life. As a rule, the medicine bag was, of course, the skin of some bird or smaller animal, but a great chief has been known to use an entire wolf's skin.

There is, however, a curious absence of the supernatural in Indian life. A brave never saw the spirit of his deceased brother. There were no ghosts in the Indian country. There was one Great Spirit who ruled the world and was worshipped by all red men of all tribes. The medicine men were the priests or only mediums of communication with the Great Spirit. There were no images or idols to which the warrior paid his devotions either specific or symbolic. When he died he went straight to the Happy Hunting Grounds, not his spirit, but he himself, and his warhorse was killed to accompany him, just as his most beautiful buckskin clothes, his finest bow and arrows and lance and his most cherished possessions were either buried with him or broken upon his tomb. The red man's magic after all is pervaded by a spirit of deep devotion which admits of no trifling, depends upon no charlatanism and is born in him whether he be Sioux, Cheyenne, Apache, or Navahoe, along with that spirit of indomitable bravery and of stoical fortitude which none may know but to admire.

H. KELLAR.